STRENGTHENING SOCIAL VOICE: ADAPTING AND CONTINUING A COLLABORATIVE ACTION/LEARNING PROCESS WITH COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS IN MPUMALANGA, SOUTH AFRICA

*Denny Mabetha, Lucia D'Ambruoso, Gerhard Goosen, Jennifer Hove, Kathleen Kahn, Jerry Sigudla, Barry Spies, Stephen Tollman, Rhian Twine, Maria van der Merwe and Sophie Witter

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*Contact:*Denny Mabetha* denny.mabetha@wits.ac.za

INTRODUCTION

- Sought perspectives of community stakeholders on their health challenges and the contexts within which these challenges occur and how they affect policy uptake and impact.

- Initiated Participatory Action Research (PAR), aimed at creating dialogue and building partnerships and trust between people *affected* by health challenges and service *providers*.

- Aimed to address
  - Lack of verifiable information on the health of people excluded from access to health systems and;
  - Lack of utilisation of evidence by district and community health systems.

METHODS

Example of photovoice product – one of the PAR methods used

- Engaged with community stakeholders (traditional healers, religious leaders, family members, youth, community leaders and community health care workers) to deliberate over their previously nominated topic.
- A series of workshops on the nominated topic of alcohol and other drug abuse among youth and adolescents:
  - Utilized various PAR techniques
  - Reviewed an action plan developed in previous work
- Systematized and collectively analyzed stakeholder perspectives to document learning.
- Generated a revised action plan.

RESULTS

- Notable shifts in the discussion outputs compared to prior work with the same stakeholders on the same topic
  - Shared understandings of the problem reflected the local setting more closely
  - More focus on youth and adolescents
  - Improved awareness of the timeliness and feasibility of actions nominated
  - Local stakeholders were identified as key role players
- Community-led awareness campaign showed ownership of the process and transfer of knowledge between stakeholders

Venn diagramming – a PAR tool used to identify local key role players

CONCLUSIONS

Communities were willing to share their experience and collaborate with government institutions to solve social and health challenges. This suggests that social voices have the potential to influence policy planning and implementation.